



Brunel
University
London



**STUDENT
SUCCESS
PROJECT**

2017-18 Year Two Report

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**STUDENT
SUCCESS
PROJECT**

For more information or to get involved in the project

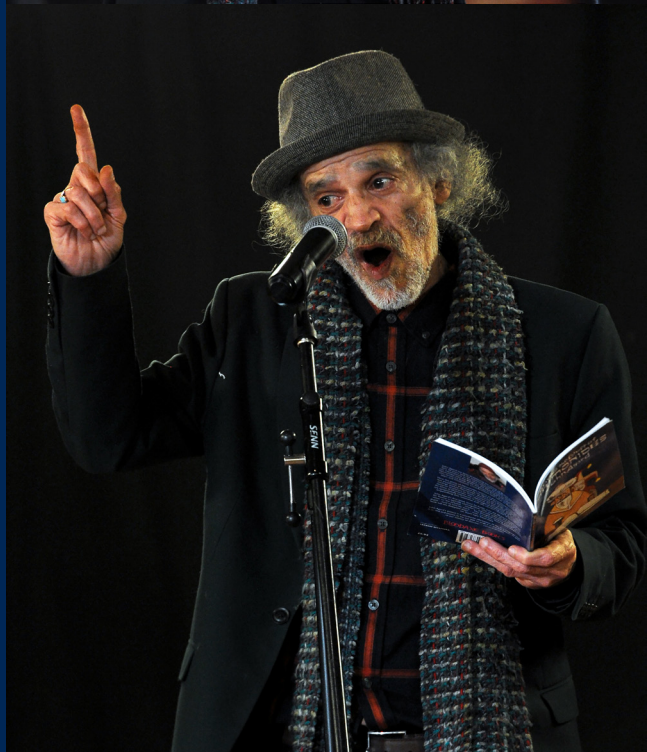
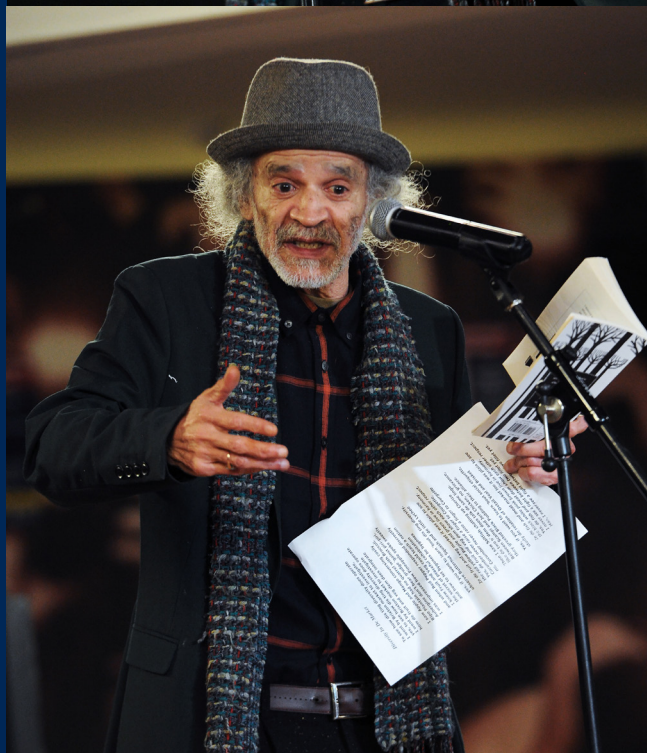
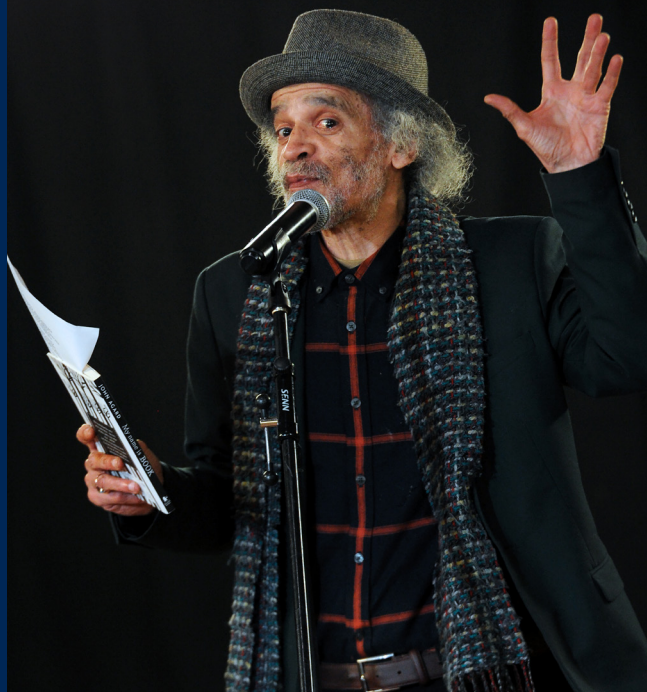
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Introduction

This report shares highlights from the second year of the Student Success Project, which was launched in September 2016 to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed at Brunel University London. We are proud to have been ranked the third most diverse university in the UK in terms of ethnicity¹, and enabling all students to realise their potential irrespective of their social or cultural backgrounds is important to us.

What constitutes success for an individual student will depend on their goals and aspirations, but the Higher Education sector often measure student success by looking at the proportion of students achieving a first or upper second class degree classification (so-called 'good degrees'). Research by the Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) in 2015 showed that across the UK, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students are less likely to achieve good degrees compared to white students. This attainment gap persists even after factors such as entry qualifications, socioeconomic status and subject area are controlled for.

Analysis of data for Brunel students show that there is a significant difference in degree outcomes of students with different characteristics; the greatest gap is between students of black and white ethnic backgrounds. Believing we have a moral obligation to address the apparent inequalities, we have committed in our OfS Access and Participation Plan to halving the attainment gap between black and white students by 2020/21 from a baseline of 22% in 2014/15. Over the past two years we have seen a steady improvement, with the gap closing to 14% in 2016/17.

The Student Success Project continues to be wide-ranging in its activities, but of particular note this year is the work related to diversification of the curriculum. We are particularly pleased that the Union of Brunel Students have continued to work collaboratively in supporting and engaging with the project in its second year, which helps keep the project focused on what matters and makes a difference to students.

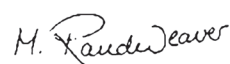
We would also like to thank all staff and students who have worked with us and share our vision of success for all.



Robyn Fitzharris
Project Manager



Iqbal Miah
Project Assistant



Mariann Rand-Weaver
Vice-Provost (Education)

SPECIAL THANKS TO...



Iqbal Miah

Iqbal Miah is a British-Bangladeshi student who studies International Business. He is passionate about the interests and success of ethnic minority students in higher education. This passion led him to become the first Student Success Project Assistant for his placement year in 2017/8. In the role, Iqbal ran the Liberated Library campaign successfully, which closed with "Slam" a poetry event headed by Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry awardee John Agard, he amplified student voice through the Brunel Listens Initiative and created a Friends and Family Guide to support new and prospective students with their transition into Higher Education.

Union of Brunel Students

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Mohamed Omar, Vice-President College of Engineering, Design and Physical Sciences, 2016-2018

Mohamed joined Brunel University in September 2013 as a student in the College of Health and Life Sciences where he went on to successfully complete his thesis on 'The Role of Sport in the Demise of Apartheid in South Africa'. As an active member of the Students' Union, Mohamed was elected as the Vice President for the College of Engineering

Design and Physical Sciences where he campaigned for the academic and welfare needs of BME students including support with the development of policies on: teaching and learning, feedback and assessment, and complaints and appeals in order to reduce the degree attainment gap. As the Student Union lead for the Student Success Project, Mohamed coordinated all of the Black History Month events in 2016 and 2017 and initiated a campaign titled 'Liberate My Degree'.

Work with the Student Success Project

1. Black History Month

The aim of Black History Month is to remember and celebrate the important achievements of black groups and individuals throughout history and at Brunel. For 2017, we decided to incorporate the four key areas of the project: awareness; sense of belonging; assessment and curriculum; and student support.

Our engagement within the Student Success project initially started through our officers' manifesto campaign to 'Liberate My Degree', and has now been developed into a holistic Union plan to be a key partner with the University.

- Our '*Black Royalties*' event had the sole purpose of providing a sense of belonging at Brunel. The event was filled with live music, drama, poetry, spoken word and a fashion show, and celebrated black talent and achievements by our students.
- For the '*Black and British in Higher Education*' we invited Busayo Twins, the first black General Secretary of LSE Students' Union to discuss assessment and curriculum and how it impacts on this demographic. We also invited Nathaniel Peat (Alumnus of the year award winner) to showcase his experiences in overcoming the challenges and barriers of being a black student in HE.

2. Black Students Forum (BSF)

BSF is a student-led organisation at Brunel initiated by the Union's BME officer to advocate for the improvement of the black student experience on campus. The forum was a key organiser for black history month and various events throughout the year, including black mental health, black students in HE and black pop culture. In 2017-18 BSF met fortnightly to discuss issues from the black attainment gap and assessment and curriculum to black pop culture, and a space for students to share their experiences at Brunel. The forum is intending to become a student society in 18/19 and a key partner for the Student Success Project.

3. AccessHE BAME Forum: Students of Colour

This forum is a consultative assembly for higher education staff working on access, support and progression of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students in Higher Education. In January 2018, we co-delivered a presentation on the Student

Success Project, including initiatives to support the BAME student experience. We encouraged other institutions to work in partnership with their students union to ensure that the student voice is at the heart of their work. At the forum, we also contributed to Access HE's new Students of Colour campaign, which looks to share and celebrate the multifaceted experiences of students who are often underrepresented.

Broader Officer Campaigns

- Lecture capture was a prevalent topic noted in our discussions with students, with feedback suggesting that the initiative would make education more accessible at Brunel, particularly for commuter and disabled students. Due to the volume of feedback received and officer manifestos, the Union decided to successfully campaign for the initiative throughout the 2016-2017 year, with it being initiated in 2017-18 and becoming a huge hit with the students.
- Mental health and wellbeing was an area of focus identified for both the Student Success Project and the wider University, with twice as many students seeking counselling than they did 10 years ago. A number of mental health awareness activities and events were held, and the Union worked successfully with the University to develop a mental health strategy which is being implemented for the upcoming academic year.
- In 2017-18, in collaboration with the Planning department, we mapped our student participation data with the Union (sports clubs, societies etc.) with the University's retention data. The data showed a positive correlation between student retention and Union engagement, which we highlighted in our contribution to the Access and Participation Plan 2019/20. This has coincided with our inaugural free sport memberships, which has seen a 34% increase in union sport members.

Throughout the past year we have seen an increase in the numbers of students and staff collaborating with the Student Success Project to showcase our success of raising awareness of and improving student engagement. However, this year was about taking a step forward and there is still more to do to deliver on the student feedback we have collated and promised to work on and achieve.

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Peri Sherif

Peri joined Brunel University to study Electronic and Electrical Engineering in September 2014 through our partner college, London Brunel International College (LBIC). As an active student, she has been heavily involved with the Union during her time at Brunel. She engaged with the students' union through being Course Rep, volunteering during elections, participating and being on committee for

Sports Clubs and even Chairing a Society. She was then elected as Vice President College of Engineering, Design and Physical Sciences in 2018. Peri's interest in access and liberation was sparked due to the nature of her course and the lack of females studying STEM subjects. In her role, Peri is the Union lead on the Student Success Project and will continue to build on her predecessor's work in partnership with SSP to tackle the BME attainment gap as well as working to empower women to aspire and achieve their full potential through her Women in Leadership Campaign.

Awareness

Engaging with Stakeholders

This year we have continued to raise awareness of the project with staff, students and the sector.

Engaging with Students

- Events run in collaboration with the Union of Brunel Students (*Liberated Library campaign, Book launch & Poetry Slam, Diversifying the Ivory Tower and Black Mental Health-Rap Association workshop*)
- Creative Project Competition (*students to showcase their creativity and think about diversity in the curriculum from a slightly different angle*)
- Brunel Listens - Student feedback session (*1 hour sessions dedicated to listening to students concerns around any barriers to their success and acting upon any feedback*)
- Student Success Project stall (*The Atrium*)

Engaging with Staff

- Vice Chancellors address to all staff
- Student Success Project work presented to committees including University Education Committee (UEC), Student Experience and Welfare Committee (SEWC) and Brunel Inclusion Access and Student Success Committee (BIASCC)
- Article on IntraBrunel and featured in VCs newsletter
- Curriculum Enhancement conversations

Engaging with the Sector

- Delivering presentations to other Higher Education institutions and organisations (*AdvanceHE: attainment symposium, AccessHE BAME forum and AccessHE conference*)
- Attending forums related to student success and attainment (*AccessHE BAME student forum*)
- Meetings with other institutions discussing key campaigns around BAME representations (met with 15 institutions)

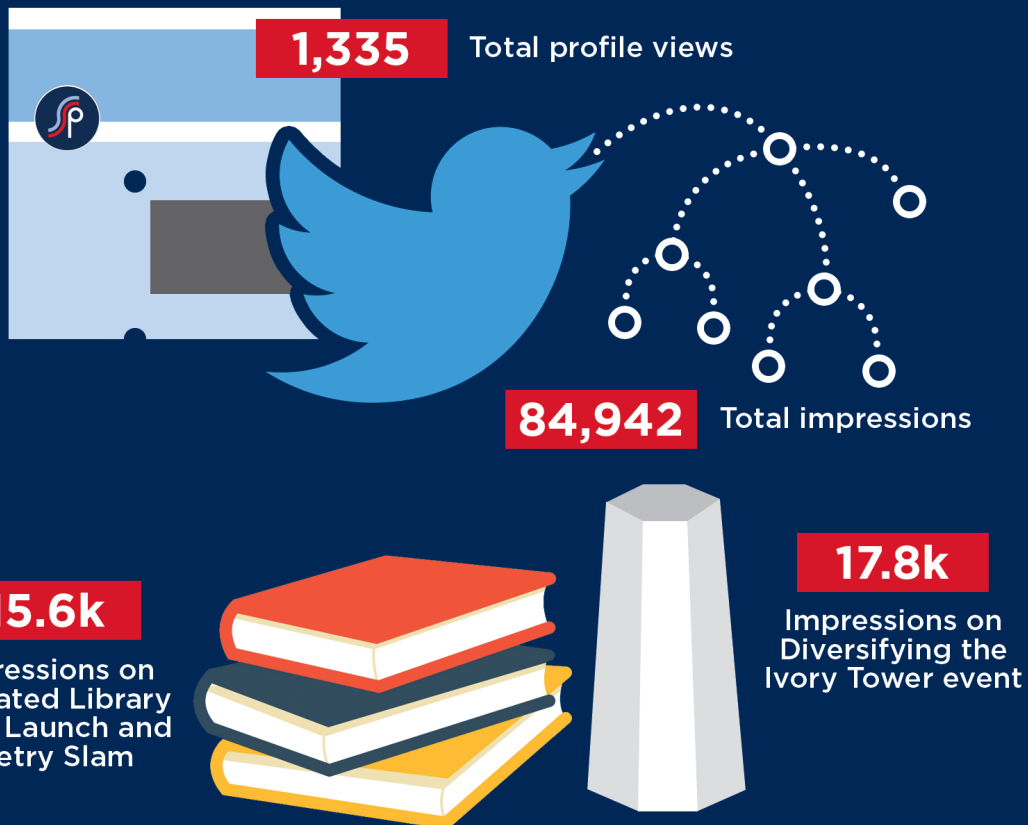
SPOTLIGHT ON...



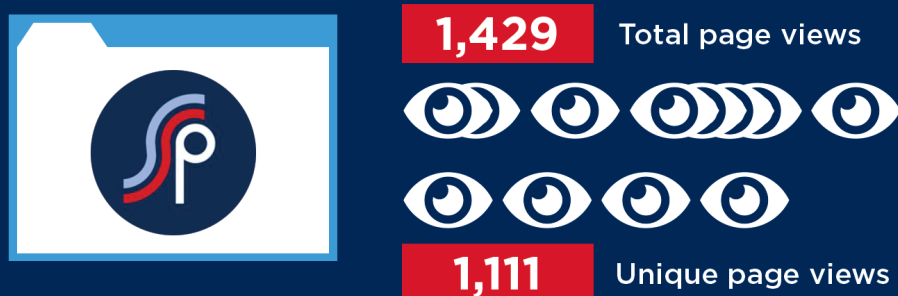
Jemmar Samuels, Student Success Project Officer

Jemmar Samuels joined Brunel University London in 2016, to study Politics and Sociology. From her first year she was engaged with the Student's Union, via the Student Course Rep, Student Assembly, Democracy Committee, African Caribbean Society and currently the Brunel West Indian Society. Before becoming the Student Success Project Assistant, she was engaged with its events and focus groups. Outside of university Jemmar is a youth activist, working on diversity, inclusion and representation through youth organizations such as Girl Guiding and the British Youth Council.

TWITTER



WEBSITE



PROJECT REPORT

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#LiberatedLibrary

We want our programmes to be engaging, interesting and meaningful for all our students, and therefore the curriculum needs to reflect our diverse student population.

To generate reflection and interest in the curriculum, we worked the Union of Brunel Students to deliver a second **#LiberatedLibrary** campaign. The aim is to engage students in diversifying library resources with new books from the global south, people of colour, female, LGBT+, and disabled authors. Building on the experience and success of the 2016/17 campaign and strengthening our “for students by students” approach, we organised several well-attended events that engaged students from across the University.

Diversifying the Ivory Tower

To officially launch the second #LiberatedLibrary campaign a discussion on diversity in publishing was held on Thursday 16th November 2017. To set the scene for the evening, two Theatre and English students spoke about their work to audit their curriculum and reading lists for gender and ethnic diversity. Their research demonstrated that their reading lists featured mainly male and white authors, and a discussion on diversity of literature and published authors was held by a panel consisting of **Benjamin Zephaniah**, poet and Brunel University Professor; **Valerie Brandes**, founder and publisher of Jacaranda Books; **Rachel Lon**, poet and leader of Octavia; and **Derek Owusu** and **Alex Reads** for the podcast MostlyLit.

The panel’s entertaining discussion covered a range of relevant topics, including: BAME representation in publishing; exploring the different avenues of black literature away from stereotypical wars, gangs and drugs; why embracing a more diverse range of literature will better ourselves; the positive impact black literature has on society; and the growing problem of tokenisation amongst reading lists in Higher Education.

The engaged audience were entertained by student poetry performances, and had the opportunity to look at the books purchased from the first #LiberatedLibrary campaign, as well as networking over refreshments. (*The recording of this event can be found online at: tinyurl.com/ybkz8ow2*)

Poetry Slam & Book Launch

The end of the #LiberatedLibrary campaign was celebrated on Thursday 22nd February 2018 with a Poetry Slam and a showcasing of the books purchased as a result of the campaign. The event was hosted by **Daljit Nagra**, Creative Writing lecturer and BBC Radio 4 featured British Poet. Twenty students from across the University performed their own poetry with style, sophistication and flair, despite many never having performed in front of an audience before.

Special guest was award-winning poet and writer **John Agard**, who read from his most famous poems, including ‘Half-Caste’ and ‘Flag’.

For more information on the #LiberatedLibrary events please visit the BrunelSSP website.

The Creative Project Competition

In February a new University-wide competition was launched to give students the chance to creatively express what diversity means to them. The 'Creative Project Competition', open to all students, sought submissions in a variety of formats, including written essays, videography, photography or a physical artwork.

After a difficult time choosing between the many innovative submissions, the judges announced the winner as Paris Hyman who was commended for her unique creativity and artistic flair for her interpretation of diversity. Paris received her £50 amazon voucher from Mariann Rand Weaver, Vice Provost Vice (Education).

To view the winning video submission please visit: tinyurl.com/y98bx9lh

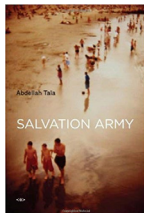
Campaign

The campaign was run between 13th-27th November 2017 using a range of promotional activities including social media, posters, banners and Brunel Intranet. A dedicated stall was set up in the library, manned each day between 11am and 3pm, which allowed for personal engagement with students to help them better understand the context of the campaign. They were also able to look at and get inspiration from previously suggested books which were on display.

Throughout the campaign, #LiberatedLibrary branded badges and bookmarks were distributed to capture students' attention and increase awareness. These items also included a web link so they are able to suggest books online in their own time through a survey.

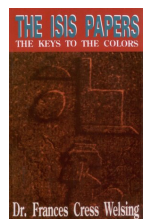
A total of 59 books were suggested, of which 27 books were subsequently purchased. Examples with quotes from Brunel students who suggested them are shown below; for a full list please visit:

brunel.ac.uk/about/student-success/Liberated-Library



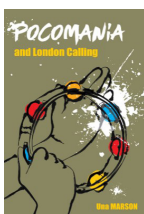
Salvation Army by Abdellah Taïa

"The first openly gay Arab writer, and remains the only openly gay Moroccan novelist and filmmaker. To not have that type of representation in the library of a university that prides itself on diversity, is something that needs to be amended."



The ISIS Papers The Keys To The Colours by Dr. Frances Cress Welsing

"It has a unique, black centred view on the causes of racism and the indicators of those insecurities within white western symbolism."



Pocomania and London Calling by Una Marson

"The book represents me, my culture, my history, even when I graduate my voice is still being heard."



Saving Bletchley Park by Dr Sue Black

"Dr Sue Black has made a positive impact on the STEM community through her campaign to get more women engaged in tech subjects. Her book on Bletchley Park chronicles the restoration of the birthplace of modern computing."





Curriculum Review

Engaging students to undertake Curriculum Reviews in English and Theatre during summer 2017 was a success, and as a result the second year of the Student Success Project such reviews by students have been expanded to other subject areas in the Department of Arts and Humanities, Law, and Biosciences. The aim of the reviews, carried out by students, are to determine the diversity of reading lists and/or curriculum content in terms of gender and ethnicity.

Q&A with Royona Mitra (Theatre) and Jurgita Malinauskaite (Law) on their experience of running curriculum review projects

Q. What process did you go through to start the curriculum review?

Royona: In spring 2017 I put forward a proposal to the Student Success Project Team to fund a pilot study that would examine gender and racial diversity in the curriculum for Theatre and English. Funding was approved to employ two second year Theatre and English joint degree students. The students, recruited via the Brunel Job Shop, worked 20 hours over the summer 2017 to gather data on course content and reading lists from information published on Blackboard Learn. The data was then reviewed, analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, and presented to senior management in the autumn of 2017. As the curriculum review was such a success for Theatre and English, the Student Success Project Team agreed to fund reviews for all remaining subjects in the Department of Arts and Humanities through spring and summer 2018, with third year students completing each subject's reviews. These reports have now all been submitted to the subject teams and the Student Success Project Team.

Jurgita: I emailed all second and third year LLB students about a paid opportunity to work with the University on a curriculum diversity project; I also approached the Law Society to obtain a male reviewer. Students were recruited through the Job Shop and selected based on their CV, interview and match to job specification. Students were advised to work no more than 5 hours a week, and work was split equally between them and in areas they were studying in.

Q. What was your experience of doing the curriculum review?

Royona: I was very honoured to have the opportunity to work with students so closely and collaboratively in addressing the lack of diversity within our curriculum. I was also very happy to see students being committed to the project in deeply political ways, and empowered by the work they were doing, knowing it will be valued by the University and have a long-lasting impact.

Initially though, I was a bit disappointed to learn that no other Department had employed or engaged students in their funded pilot projects in their efforts to start engaging with and addressing the issues around the attainment gap. I have also found the defensiveness and resistance from some academics really disheartening, especially when some find it hard to acknowledge that what they include in their reading lists and within their class content, has a direct impact on the quality of University life of our students of colour.

Jurgita: I found it very enjoyable to witness students having the opportunity to work independently, reviewing the programme that they are studying with such maturity and critical analysis. I was sceptical at first about getting students to

review the reading material, but they found it very interesting and eye opening. The students were nominated for the regional award for Student Employee of the Year (SEOTY), and both Samar Choudhry and Daniel Mosey were the winners of Brunel Commercial Impact employee of the year for their work on auditing the Brunel Law School reading materials.

Q. If there was anything you could change what would it be?

Royona: As an academic of colour, the project means a great deal to me and I believe it is a deeply political one. I am interested to examine the real reasons for the attainment gap, implement changes to address these issues, and bring long-lasting positive change to the quality of University life for our students of colour at Brunel. I would therefore frame the project as a deeply political one, that is committed to not just improving attainment gap figures in degree classifications, but also takes seriously the matter of permanently redressing power dynamics in our curriculum and the classroom, and in how our students of colour experience Brunel. As a staggeringly diverse University, we need to do much more to de-centre the education we are offering, and actually improving the experiences of our students of colour is a project I am deeply invested in.

Jurgita: I would not have changed anything major, but I would like to see if postgraduate students are affected in terms of the level of diversity. I would also be interested to do more work to understand why commercial law is less diverse than family law.

Q. What was your reaction to the outcome?

Royona: I was disheartened by the hard data and the extent of the problem in our curriculum that it revealed. But it has fuelled me to engage with programme leaders and subject teams in sustained ways to carry out their own review in dialogue with the reports and their students, to bring about much needed change.

Jurgita: I was not really surprised by the data showing that ethnic diversity in the literature and reading lists were non-existent, but and this has to change.

Q. What actions are you taking as a result of the review?

Royona: I will be encouraging academics to review their reading lists and curriculum content to achieve more gender and racial diversity – this includes my own modules. I am also currently planning a cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional one-day symposium for 2019 to be hosted at Brunel, on the theme of de-centring ‘diversity’ and the University experience. Lastly, I will implement changes apparent from the data and work collaboratively with other higher education institutions by sharing best practice around decolonising theatre and dance studies. Being part of this project at Brunel has given me the impetus to take this work forward in my own scholarship and to other institutions within and beyond the UK.

Jurgita: Plans are already in place for next academic year, including: further research-related seminars for staff; College events on decolonising the curriculum; continuing the awareness of diversity in the curriculum through talks and presentation in the Teaching and Learning Symposium. For undergraduate and postgraduates dissertation sessions, how to conduct literature reviews in a more diverse manner is also in place.

Support

Academic Introduction Task

Having identified a gap in communication with students between accepting an offer to attend and arriving at Brunel, we successfully piloted subject-specific Academic Introduction Tasks for students joining in September 2017. For September 2018 joiners, all subjects areas provided Academic Introduction Tasks brunel.ac.uk/life/welcome-week/Academic-Introduction-Tasks, which are completed pre-arrival and provide a meaningful opportunity to engage with tutors and peers during Welcome Week. The aim is to engender a 'sense of belonging' and support students in the transition to higher education, thereby improving retention rates.

Friends & Family Guide

A Friends and Family Guide has been developed which will be given to the new student cohort starting in September 2018. This is particularly helpful for students who are first in their families to attend University, as the guide explains University life and includes a mock student timetable and glossary to help friends and family to better understand student lives and how they can help them achieve their potential.[LINK]

Black Mental Health Event

In collaboration with the Union of Brunel Students an event to raise awareness of black mental health amongst students was held. The interactive workshop was run by Rap Association, a small social enterprise that uses rap as a tool to educate, entertain and empower individuals. The evening included lyric writing, discussions on the taboo of black mental health and raising awareness to the wider black community. The event provided a safe space for black students to open up on issues that they may have not talked about before, with the aim of promoting healthy wellbeing and discussing the challenges faced in the black community.

Student Life Cycle

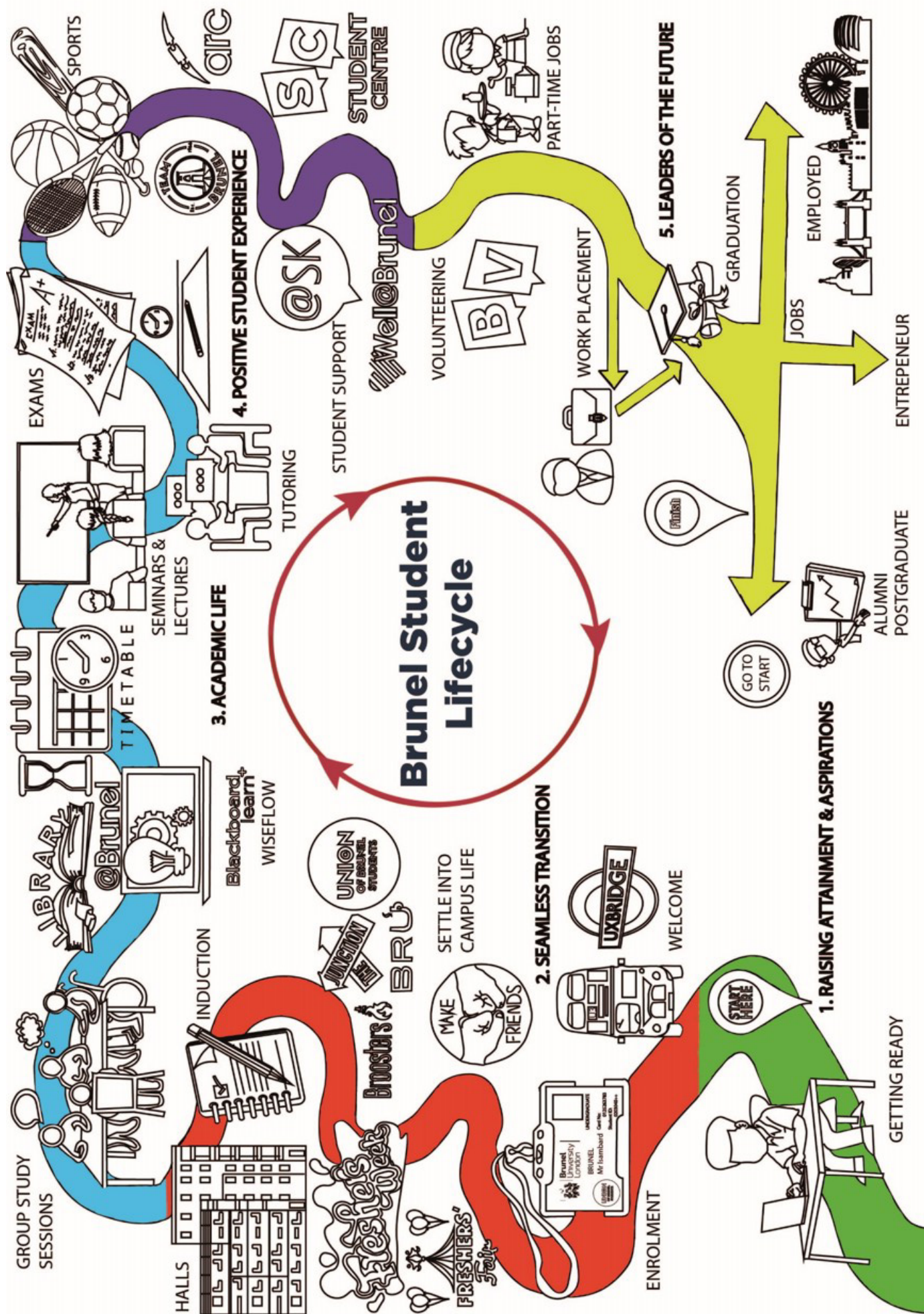
Our placement student was inspired by a student life cycle diagram from Kingston University to create a diagram of the Brunel student lifecycle. It will be used to inspire conversations with staff about future areas of development and activities, and to remind us that only by being joined up in what we do will we properly impact the student experience.

Developing Skills through Gaming

The three-month challenge set by Games Design's annual summer project Octopus 8, is a great way for first and second year students interested in a career in Games Design to get hands-on experience of producing a game from inception to being published. Recognising the potential to use gaming to develop students' skills, the Student Success Project funded one of the teams to produce a game to improve students' note-taking skills (Investigate Tudors). Second year Games Design and Creative Writing student Harry Prebble (producer) explained:

"As the player you listen to conversations as a spy, and you need to get all the names and details to complete a report, so it develops your reading and listening skills. We hope the game will help students to develop a key University study skill."

brunel.ac.uk/study/BEEC/academic-skills/academic-skills-service/Learning-Activities





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For more information or to get involved in the project

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